The Methodist

THE THESPIAN: LIFE AND FILMS OF DILIP KUMAR

By URMILA LANBA; Vision: 158; Pages: 160; Rs 325

By **BHAICHAND PATEL**

THE word 'superstar' is thrown around quite freely these days but when you think of it, there have been only two in Bollywood: Dilip Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan. They stand head and shoulders above the rest. The Raj Kapoors, Rajesh Khannas and Shah Rukhs come and go.

Urmila Lanba's fine biography of Dilip Kumar is all the more welcome since lately we have had a deluge of atrocious books on Indian cinema, beginning with Anupama Chopra's *Sholay*, a hack job, and ending with Justine Hardy's *Bollywood Boy*. Hardy didn't have a clue. This book is readable and thorough. Lanba seems to have seen all of Dilip Kumar's films and has read reviews going back to the defunct *Filmindia*. She has interviewed a large number of people who have been associated with the actor as friends, colleagues or through familial ties.

The book tells all you need to know about the actor without being idolatrous or malicious. The few errors are minor. Ashok Kumar did not play Madhubala's father in *Basant*. It was Ulhas. Ashok Kumar was not in that film. Begum Para was not in *Shabnam*. The film that Dilip Kumar's father-in-law produced was *Chandni Raat*, not *Anokhi Raat*.

Yusuf Khan, that's his real name, would still be selling fruit wholesale in Mumbai's Crawford Market had he not met Devika Rani by chance. She was impressed with his good Pathani looks and natural charm. Bombay Talkies was in search of a new hero. Ashok Kumar had left to set up Filmistan. The other actor on the studio's payroll, Najam-ul-Hassan, had been fired already for having an affair with Devika Rani who happened to be the boss's wife!

Dilip Kumar's first film, *Jwar Bhata*, did not make waves when it was released in 1944. The second also flopped. But the young actor hit the jackpot with *Milan* which was based on a Tagore story. Years later, Dilip Kumar was to pay homage to the film's director, Nitin Bose, by giving him credit for directing *Ganga Jamuna*, a film that was directed by Dilip himself.

Lanba pays the actor a dubious compliment by calling him a thespian on the cover and several times in the book. Thespians play tragedy. Dilip was good at it. There was a time when the poor chap was called upon to die tragically at the end of every second movie. He would sing sadly of lost love, usually in the voice of Talat Mehmood, and pop off just before "The End".

But Dilip Kumar was also good at comedy. He proved that in *Kohinoor* and *Ram aur Shyam*. He could also be a swashbuckler in the style of Douglas Fairbanks. Who can forget Mehboob's *Aan*? Davin Lean offered him a role in *Lawrence of Arabia*. He turned it down.

Dilip Kumar in 'Devdas'

It eventually went to Omar Sharif. Lanba has another interesting tidbit. K.A. Abbas had offered his story, *Awaara*, to Mehboob who wanted Dilip Kumar to play the lead. Abbas didn't think much of the idea and took it to Raj Kapoor. The rest is history.

Dilip Kumar had a roaring affair with Kamini Kaushal until her husband stopped her from acting opposite him. The love of his life was, of course, Madhubala. But she had a father from hell. He wouldn't let the golden goose go. The affair ended acrimoniously in court where Dilip, in true Hindi movie fashion, declared his endless love.

Dilip left it late and married Saira Bano, many years his junior. Then there was his second marriage, undertaken nervously and secretly in Hyderabad. By then he was 55. When Saira Bano found out, all hell broke loose. He had to let Asma go. We are all entitled to some mistakes in our lives but this one was a big one. ■